

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7815
INFO PANCANAL
USSOUTHCOM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EWWT, PN, US
SUBJECT: COCO SOLO PORT

REF: TAYLOR/POPPER TELECON OF 6/29/78

SUMMARY: EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT THE PORT AUTHORITY AND ITS CONTRACTOR BE AUTHORIZED TO COMPLETE ON-SITE ENGINEERING STUDIES AT COCO SOLO. HOWEVER, WE ARE SKEPTICAL THAT THE CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR WILL REALLY BE ABLE TO BEGIN WORK BEFORE TREATY EFFECTIVE DATE. THEREFORE, WHILE WE BELIEVE THE US GOVERNMENT SHOULD GRANT FULL ACCESS TO THE SITE PRIOR TO OCTOBER 1979, WE SHOULD BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT A GO-AHEAD ON CONSTRUCTION BEFORE THEN. END SUMMARY.

1. SUMMARY. THERE WAS AN INFORMAL MEETING HERE JUNE 30 BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PANAMA PORT AUTHORITY AND THEIR CANADIAN CONTRACTOR, SWAN-WOOSTER ENG. CO. OF CANADA, ON THE ONE HAND, AND U.S. GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES, ON THE OTHER. COL. CHARLES CLARK, DIRECTOR OF
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PANCANAL'S TRANSPORTATION AND TERMINALS BUREAU, CHAIRED THE MEETING. THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING WAS TO GET DETAILS OF A REQUEST BY THE PORT AUTHORITY FOR PERMISSION TO DO CERTAIN BORE-DRILLING AND SURVEYING IN THE COCO SOLO PORT AREA. PANCANAL AND SOUTHCOM MADE CLEAR THAT THE DECISION COULD BE MADE ONLY IN WASHINGTON, NOT HERE.

2. IN BRIEF, SWAN-WOOSTER WANTS TO BEGIN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO TAKE ABOUT 40 CORE SAMPLINGS IN THE AREA (10 ONSHORE AND 30 OFFSHORE) AND TO UNDERTAKE A VARIETY OF SURVEYS OF LAND, IMPROVEMENTS AND OFFSHORE AREAS. COL. CLARK POINTED OUT THAT THE CONTRACTOR HAS BEEN WORKING OFF-AND-ON FOR NEARLY TWO YEARS ON THE SITE, WITH PANCANAL PERMISSION. HE SAID HE PERSONALLY THOUGHT IT WOULD BE REASONABLE TO ALLOW THE CONTRACTOR TO COMPLETE ITS WORK (IT HAS ALREADY DONE SOME BORE-DRILLING AND BUILDING SURVEYS), BUT POINTED OUT THE POLITICAL SENSITIVITY OF THE PRE-IMPLEMENTATION ISSUE.

3. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT THE PORT AUTHORITY AND ITS CONTRACTOR BE GRANTED AUTHORITY TO COMPLETE SURVEYING AND DRILLING IN THE AREA.

4. FYI. IN THE COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION, THE CONTRACTOR REPRESENTATIVE SAID THAT HIS COMPANY'S PLAN IS TO FINISH THE ENGINEERING DESIGN STUDY BY THE END OF JANUARY 1979, PROVIDED IT CAN NOW GO AHEAD WITH ITS SURVEYS/DRILLING ON SITE. HE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT WOULD REQUIRE TWO OR THREE MONTHS TO GET EQUIPMENT ON THE SCENE TO DO THE WORK. FIGURING IN A FEW MONTHS FOR APPROVAL OF THE ENGINEERING STUDY BY THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT, PLUS THE BUREAUCRATIC AND LOGISTICAL DELAYS WHICH USUALLY ACCOMPANY PROJECTS IN PANAMA, THERE IS -- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN OUR JUDGMENT -- SOME BASIS FOR CONCERN THAT, EVEN IF WE GAVE A GO-AHEAD FOR PORT CONSTRUCTION PRIOR TO OCTOBER 1, 1979, NO ON-SITE WORK WOULD TAKE PLACE BEFORE THAT DATE. PERHAPS A REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE TO GRANTING PERMISSION TO BEGIN WORK BEFORE TREATY EFFECTIVE DATE WOULD BE TO GRANT FULL ACCESS AND PERMISSION TO MOVE IN EQUIPMENT. THIS WOULD PRESUMABLY AVOID THE PROBLEM OF GRANTING A LICENSE, THE MINIMUM WAGE, ETC., AND WOULD -- AT MOST -- DELAY THINGS TWO OR THREE MONTHS. IN ANY EVENT, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE WISE TO DELAY A FINAL DECISION UNTIL THE SITUATION BECOMES CLEARER. JORDEN

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